

Title Luck of war : a play in one act
Published 1922, LondonGlasgow
Creator John, Gwen

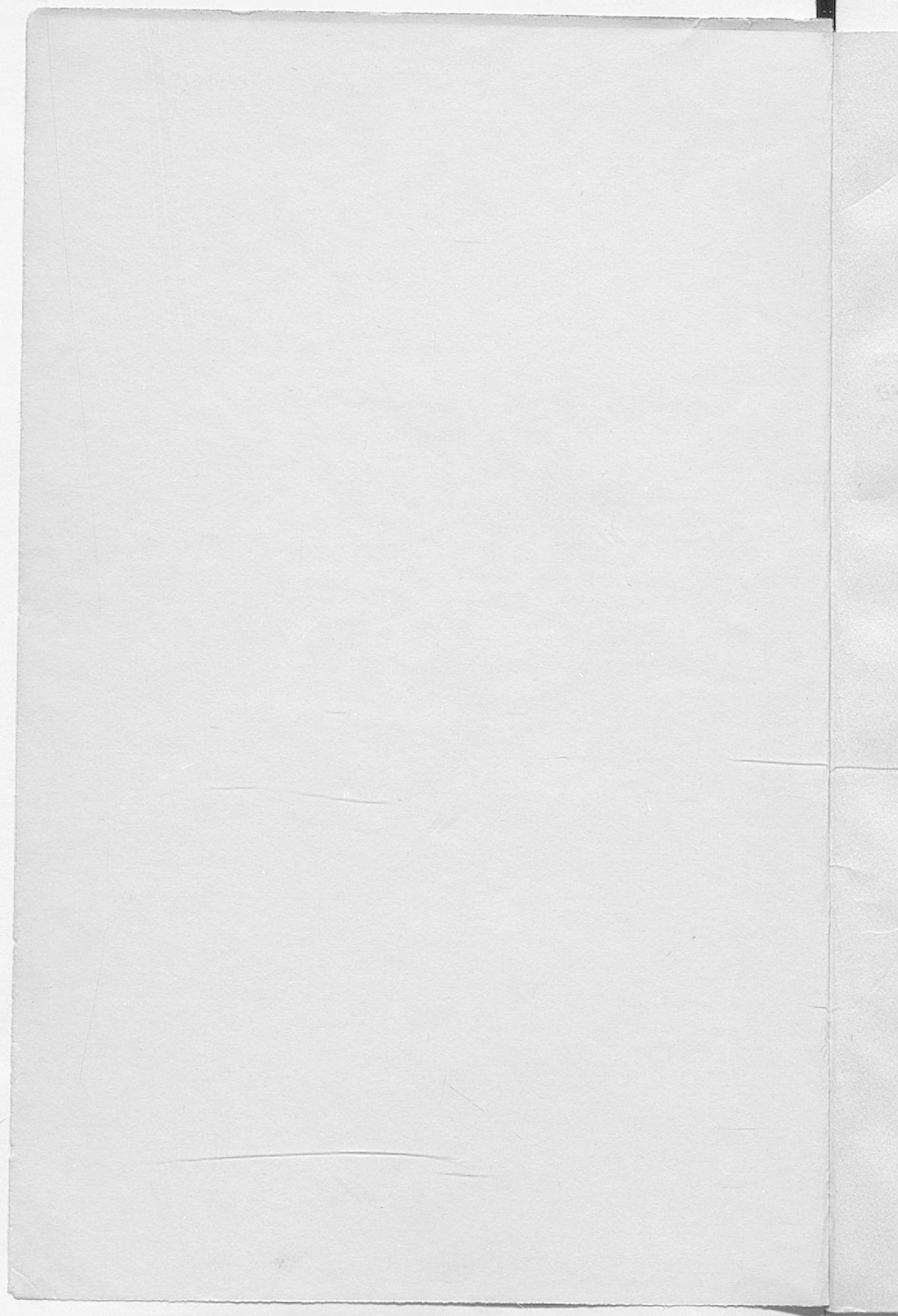
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REPERTORY PLAYS, No. 17

LUCK OF WAR

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LUCK OF WAR

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

GWEN JOHN

GOWANS & GRAY, LTD., LONDON AND GLASGOW
LEROY PHILLIPS, BOSTON, U.S.A.

1922

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LUCK OF WAR

THE LUCK OF WAR



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CHARACTERS

AMOS CRISPIN.

ANN HEMINGWAY (*married to Amos Crispin*).

MAUD HEMINGWAY.

A NEIGHBOUR (*Woman*).

GEORGE HEMINGWAY, *A Soldier*. (*He has lost a foot.*)

VICTOR HEMINGWAY.

CHARACTERISTICS

1. *Form*

2. *Size*

3. *Color*

4. *Texture*

5. *Odor*

6. *Taste*

*This Play was produced at the Kingsway Theatre on May 13th,
1917, by the Pioneer Players, with the following cast :*

<i>Amos Crispin,</i>	-	-	WORDLEY HULSE.
<i>Ann,</i>	-	-	WISH WYNNE.
<i>Maud Hemingway,</i>	-	-	FABIA DRAKE.
<i>Neighbour,</i>	-	-	MADELEINE GRANDE.
<i>George Hemingway,</i>	-	-	A. S. HOMEWOOD.
<i>Victor Hemingway,</i>	-	-	AUDREY CAMERON.

The first and second of the following names are the names of the first and second of the following names.

Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

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Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

Walter H. H.

LUCK OF WAR

SCENE :—*A kitchen living-room in the Northern Midlands. There are two doors, one R.C. is the outer door, the one left leads to a bedroom. There is a piano left; on the right wall over the fire-place there hangs a framed memorial card, also a looking-glass. Dresser C. wall.*

Amos Crispin is walking about preparing anxiously for some function. He wears his Sunday blacks, his hair is oiled, and he has great trouble with his collar and tie. The collar is linen; the shirt is flannel. It is difficult to make them adhere. Ann, newly married to him, helps him, ties his tie, etc. He is a little restive.

AMOS (R.)

(*Irritably.*) Look careful, lass. Ow! Tha's run pin i' me.

ANN

Tha munna be ser fractious. I canna let thee go wi' thee collar all aside. There, that's better. Tha'd better let me gi' thee a broosh down.
[*Crosses left for clothes-brush.*]

AMOS

Aye, I suppose I 'ad. It isn't as if I could sit at t' back o' t' hall.

LUCK OF WAR

ANN

Noa, thee'll be noaticed. I wouldn't like to 'ave thee all any road.

[Maud, Ann's child by her first marriage, puts her head in at the outer door R., then enters.]

MAUD

Can I see 'im, moother?

ANN

Aye, thee can directly. 'E's nearly finished.
(Gives him a few more strokes with the brush.)
There, doesn't 'e look smart?

MAUD

Aye, 'e doos that. Why does 'e?

ANN

It's 'is party, my loove. It's to celebrate 'im.

AMOS

Look 'ere, Ann, where's my badge? I ought to 'ave it.

ANN

I'll find it yer. *(Runs to room through door L.)* I know just where it is.

MAUD

It is to celebrate you bein' my new dada?

AMOS

Nay, Maud, this is a meetin' at t' chapel-hall.—
Seems like t'owd lad's got into this botherin'
stud!

MAUD

What's t' meetin' for?

ANN

(*Returning with badge of starred occupation.*) Don't
yer ask ser many questions, Maud. 'E's a
wonderful man is your new dada.

MAUD

But for why? I want to know—

ANN

Aye, want may want. Leeers for wantin' to know
other folk's business.

MAUD

(*Coaxingly.*) You tell me, Measter Crispin—new
dada.

AMOS

You tell 'er, Ann.

ANN

Aye, you'll spoil 'er, like the rest on 'em. Well, if
yer want to know, it's a party, to celebrate
your new dada's 'aving kept the pledge these
eight years. And you ought to be thankful
for 'aving such a dada.

LUCK OF WAR

AMOS

(*Complacently.*) It's i' honour o' my sobriety.

MAUD

(*Staring at him.*) 'As 'e kep' it that long?

AMOS

Yes, Maud, I 'ave; not that I take the credit mysen.

MAUD

And they're that pleased wi' you they're givin' you a party?

AMOS

A celebration, Maud, to testify—

MAUD

Did you drink afore that?

ANN

Hush, Maud, no he didna, only a little.

AMOS

No, Maud, I'm thankful to say I were not much tempted—not very much. That is, there's those is tempted worse.

MAUD

I thought it was only them as drank 'oo took the pledge—exceptin' the Band of 'Ope. Nelly Smith's father, 'e drank cruel, and 'e—

ANN

Do shut up, Maudie, there's someone at t' door.

[Maud runs to the door R. and opens it. A neighbour woman comes in. Ann is up L.]

WOMAN

I were just down at t' post, Mrs. Crispin, 'aving a word wi' t' missis there, and she gied me this 'ere letter to bring you. She 'adn't 'er Jimmy in. It's addressed "Mrs. Hemingway."

ANN

(Starts.) Gi' it 'ere. Thank you, missis. Doesn't Amos look fine?

WOMAN

Aye, 'e does that. Ye'll be fair makin' 'im proud wi' all that fandykin', I'm sayin'.

ANN

But 'e's a wonderful man is my 'usband, missis. Eight years 'e's kep' 'is pledge.

WOMAN

Yer don't say!

AMOS

Aye, it is that.

WOMAN

I'm reet glad to hear on't as it can be kept that while. I wish my mester'd tek it. I'll see

you later i' t' day. I'm going up to the hall mysen. (*Indicating Maud.*) Eh, but that lass is the fair marrow o' the owd mester!

ANN

You won't be i' time if you don't 'urry.

WOMAN

I shall. It doesn't take me long to wesh me.—
Aren't you goin' to look at t' letter, loove?
'Appen it's fro' yer brother 'Orace i' Indy.

ANN

T' letter 'll keep. I'm throng now gettin' ready
for this 'ere party. I dunno 'oo it's from.

WOMAN

I won't 'inder yer then; but yer are close!
[*Goes.*]

ANN

Yes, and I'm like to be close. Amos, look. 'Oo
can it be from? Maud, run along out and
play yer.

[*Maud lingers. Ann pushes her away.*]

Be off wi' yer!

[*She goes.*]

AMOS

Oppen it and see, can't yer? Someone 'oo 'asn't
'eard the 'appy news, seeing as 'ow 'e owns
yer as Mrs. 'Emingway.

ANN

It's not fro' 'Orace. I never 'ave no letters from
no one 'ardly.

AMOS

Well, tha's got one now, so make the best on't.
Look quick, too, it's time tha were makin'
ready.

ANN

You oppen it.

[She gives it him, and he opens it.]

ANN

It's from 'im ! 'E's livin'.

AMOS

(Slowly, looking at the letter.) Aye—aye—To think
o' that !

ANN

I knew what it were at onst. I ought never to 'a
believed 'im dead wi'outen I'd seen 'im ! Give
t' letter 'ere.

AMOS

(After handing it over.) What is it 'e says? 'E'll
be 'ere almost any time—when ?

ANN

(Pointing to letter.) Thursday or Friday. To-day's
Thursday. *(She is sitting at table C. with the
letter before her.)*

AMOS

I mun go to t' meeting all t' same, Ann.

ANN

(*Irritably.*) O' course tha mun. It's nowt to do wi' thee.

AMOS

It's this, I shall 'ave to quit if it's t' truth.

ANN

If that's all, tha might 'a done it earlier! O' course it's truth. He's written it hissen.

AMOS

Aye, tha's too 'asty, Ann; I'm not sayin' nowt agen thee when I speak o' quittin'. But it's a bit o' a shock like.

ANN

Aye; it's a bit o' a shock.

AMOS

Seems like I'd better clear out on't to-neet.

ANN

Tha can do as tha's a mind. I shan't say nothing neither way. 'E'll 'ave to know tha's been lodgin' 'ere, an' all. And as we're married.

AMOS

Aye; but not to-neet. I could flit down to my sister Lizzie's. She'll happen have room.

ANN

'Tha can. Fancy 'im comin' back, an' all!

AMOS

Aye, it's unnatural. An' when we'd made so sure 'e were dead, poor George.

ANN

Aye; we made sure enough!

AMOS

'E says as 'ow 'e's been i' t' 'ospital, 'ow long is it?

ANN

Two month.

AMOS

And never to 'a let us know till it come to this.
We wasna married then.

ANN

George wasna much o' a hand wi' a pen. Happen they made 'im write i' t' 'ospital. Happen he didn't know as we'd heard as he was missing. 'E's never wrote to me, not since 'e left England—not much afore. That were what always angered me. I never thought 'e showed much consideration, leaving me with the childer an' all! 'E was one of the first to volunteer. I do blame a man does that when 'e 'as a good 'ome. It wasn't as if they'd 'ad to do it then. All t' neighbours

said it semt as I'd not done right by 'im, 'im being so eager. That were not doing right by me! 'E's not even ever seen our Doris; I don't know as 'e knows she's born.

AMOS

Shan't yer be glad to see 'im back?

ANN

(Dispassionately, but with an undercurrent of emotion.)
Glad—I feel like runnin' away like a whipped dog.

AMOS

That 'ud be a sad home-comin' for George.

[Ann laughs.]

Tha wunna do it?

ANN

Nay, lad, tha may stake thy word I'm not t' runnin'-away kind.

AMOS

(Anxiously.) I'd take down that there card.

[Ann crosses to the wall R., where a framed black-edged card hangs.]

ANN

Aye, happen I'd better. *(Reads out.)* "In lovin' memory of George Hemingway, reported missin' after the Battle of Nerve Chapel. For King and Country."

The 'ero's grave we may not know,
But yet his wife and children tell,
As on life's path they weepin' go,
'Ow true and brave that 'ero fell."

I like that bit o' readin'. It seems a pity like to
take it down. George would 'a liked that.
I did miss 'im, an' all, fair chronic.

AMOS

Aye, if only 'e could a' known it when it were true.

ANN

Aye. And it were true once.—Amos!

AMOS

Yes?

ANN

Do you think happen—he'll be wounded bad?
Blinded, or owt cruel?

AMOS

'Ow can I tell, wench? Still, 'e 'as wrote—'e
must 'ave 'is sight.

ANN

(In a tone of fear.) I thought 'is writin' looked as
'ow 'e 'adn't.

AMOS

(Soothingly.) Thee munna be fanciful.

ANN

'E says Thursday, 'appen. I wonder will 'e be
back to-neet—

AMOS

Nay, lass, I canna tell thee.

ANN

I durstn't face 'im alone. I'm afeared on 'im,
Amos—I never meant 'im no wrong!

AMOS

No more did none on us—you're not to blame.
It were t' newspaper.

ANN

There might easy be two men wi' t' same name.
I were too 'asty.

AMOS

It were his own fault not writin' if 'e were livin'.

ANN

Aye, it were that.

[*Rattle of a latch.*

There's t' yard gate, Amos. Go—I canna. I
believe it's 'im. (*She makes as though to go to
the room L., then stops.*)

[*Amos goes.*

[*Ann leans against the back of a chair and
waits. There is more rattling, and voices.*

AMOS

(Off. *Cheerily.*) Aye, it's 'im reet enough!

[They enter noisily. The new-comer is in khaki, very much the worse for wear, and has a bandaged leg and crutches. Ann turns to him, they kiss, but awkwardly.]

GEORGE

I'm whoam again, lass; what's left o' mysen.

ANN

Yes, George, tha's back again—after all this long, long while. Tha's changed, George.

GEORGE

Aye, I've changed. Trenches doesn't leave yer no younger, my wench. Didsta think I should never come again?

ANN

(*Sobs.*) Doan't ask me what I thought.

GEORGE

Didsta think I was dead and gone for ever?

[Ann hides her face.]

T' childer will be grown out o' mind, I reckon. Where is they?

ANN

Out playin' theirselves. I didn't know yer'd be 'ere yet awhile. Yer'd better sit thee down—tha'll be tired, only just out o' t' 'ospital.

LUCK OF WAR

GEORGE

I am that. (*She helps him to the chair left of the centre table, and he sits wearily*).

ANN

And hungry?

GEORGE

That'll do later. 'Asta got some o' the old blue-vinied cheese? I'll 'ave that; but I want a look round first. Tha's a bit changed thysen, lass. So's t' room. Why, is that a pianna I see? 'Ow's thee coom by that?

ANN

I bowt it, George.

GEORGE

Well they mun 'a done pretty well by thee in 'lowance if thee could buy a pianna. And owd Amos 'ere—my, isn't 'e smart! It's not Whi'suntide nor t' feast, nor nothing. What's oop?

ANN

'E's just off to a celebration at t' chapel-'all.

GEORGE

Well yer'd think it was to celebrate 'im, wouldn't yer? And 'e's come in to show 'isself off, 'as 'e?—'Oo's burial card is yon? 'Oo's gone? Willie?

ANN

(Starts confusedly.) Oh, that—

GEORGE

Yes. 'Oo's is it?

ANN

(Desperately.) It's thine, George.

GEORGE

Mine—my word, that is a good 'un.

[Amos' slinks out.]

ANN

It's God's truth, George.

GEORGE

Oh, it's God's truth, is it? Well, it's devil's lies,
I should 'a thought, seeing as I'm here.

ANN

We thought you was dead, we did, though I was
to die the next minute!

GEORGE

'Oo told yer that, my lass?

ANN

It were i' t' paper.

GEORGE

Yer never can depend on them papers.

ANN

It were in large as life, "George Hemingway."
And there was a nice few other names along
wi' it.

GEORGE

Well, it warn't me.

ANN

Then yer might 'a written! I thought happen
as you'd been blown up wi' a boom, and
nowt left.

GEORGE

'Ow was I to know yer was getting stuffed up wi'
such fairy-tales?

ANN

Yer might 'a guessed it if I never 'eard—week in
week out. Everybody says if you're missing
six months and no news as you're dead.
After six months they stop your separation
allowance and put you on a pension.

GEORGE

They do, do they? And when do they let you
marry again?

ANN

I' t' same time. They say it's pretty sure by that
time. Then they pay you £39 down and
'a done—at least they do it that road 'ere.

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GEORGE

I think it were time I coom back.

ANN

Aye, I've thought so mysen, George. For owt you
knew I might 'a been starving.

GEORGE

I left you to t' country, Ann, as a soldier 'as to do.
But if you'd been one o' them blatant brassy-
haired hussies I shouldn't 'a done it. I knew
tha could look after thysen.

ANN

'Ow did you know t' country was doing right
by me?

GEORGE

It expected me to do right by it. Tha mun leave
summut to chance.

ANN

And tha did leave me to chance!

GEORGE

That's it, is it? Tha temper's up now I've come
home. That's a nice welcome for a man
'oo's 'ad one foot sent to 'ell before 'im.

ANN

I'm not angry, George.

GEORGE

(*Appeased.*) Then don't thee be'ave as if thee were. (*Pointing to framed card.*) Let's see yon memorandum. It's not every man gets t' chance to see 'is own epitaph, is it?

[*Ann brings it to him.*

"In loving memory"—makes you feel a bit chilly down't back, that!—'ere's the 'ymn—"The 'ero's grave we may not know, But yet 'is wife and childer tell, As on life's path they weepin' go," (*Here he pauses, pulls out his pocket-handkerchief and blows his nose hard.*) "'Ow true and brave that 'ero fell." I like that. 'Oo—(*Blows his nose again.*) 'Oo made up them lines, Ann?

ANN

(*Looking away.*) It were Amos Crispin, George.

GEORGE

It were? Where is Amos?

ANN

I think 'e's gone out to t' celebration—or 'appen 'e thought 'e was in t' road.

GEORGE

I'll thank 'im 'eartily when I see 'im next. It's a bit o' good readin'. If you'd sent it to me i' t' trenches I should 'a broken down.

[*A child runs in.*

Oo's that? Why, it's never our Maud, is it?

[Maud hesitates, then runs to her mother and points to George.]

MAUD

Oo's that strange mester, mooother?

ANN

(Drawing her to her soothingly.) It's thy dada come home fra the war, Maudie. Thy dada we thought wouldn't never come back no more.

MAUD

My dada's dead. *(Turning to George.)* My dada's killed. Mester Crispin's my new dada.

ANN

(Cries.) Maud, he isna!

MAUD

Yes 'e is, mother, you told me so yoursen! And May Parker, she said, "And not afore it were time."

ANN

Maud, 'ow can you say such things, and your own dada here! Your own dada that was a 'ero back again—and lame, Maud—poor dada. Yer munna talk so.

MAUD

Well, you told me. Is that dada? 'E's only one foot.

ANN

Aren't you glad to see 'im, Maud? Aren't yer going to kiss 'im?

GEORGE

(*Suddenly.*) Send t' child away! Tell the brat to get out o' my sight, before I do 'er an injury.

MAUD

(*Frightened.*) Let me go, moother. I'll go to Victor, he's fightin'.

[*She runs out.*]

GEORGE

Now, what's this I 'ear, Ann?

ANN

George, I thought you was dead.

GEORGE

(*Angrily.*) And this is what a man gets for fightin' for 'is 'ome. (*Then, overcome, he bows his head on the table.*)

ANN

George, I wouldn't 'a done it, not for worlds—don't yer believe me?—but there was t' two children when yer left—and then Doris were born and there was three—and you didn't even know—and I were that lonely—I 'ad to fend for them.

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GEORGE

(Suddenly.) When were this 'ere Doris born?

ANN

Just after you'd gone to France, George. I meant to tell you as a surprise—and then you never wrote, and I wouldna.

[He turns away with a look of disgust.]

She's your own baby, George, and you've never even seen 'er. You mun look at her.

GEORGE

She's not mine. I dunna believe it.

ANN

She is! *(Searches her memory for proof.)* I got separation allowance for her.

GEORGE

That proves nowt.

ANN

Oh, but it does. They're most cunning, George. They'd not give it wrongfully.

GEORGE

'Ow'd they know?

ANN

Better than what you know to t' contrary. Ponder on it, George, and dunna it seem likely?

GEORGE

I 'eard nowt on't before I went.

ANN

Tha doesn't tek that much notice. And I 'oped it would go off at first.

GEORGE

You're i' the right o' it, I suppose. I don't seem to 'ave much proof o' nothing—I ought to a kep' a better eye on you.

ANN

So I've been thinking this while back, George. Tha's left me to fend for mysen.

GEORGE

That warn't no reason why thee should fix on Amos, before I were cold i' t' earth, so to speak.

ANN

It were just broodin' on thee death, George, that made me feel so lonely-like. When I thought thee was livin' I could 'a hated all husbands, for the way tha'd treated me and left me an' all—but when tha were dead it were different. I felt sorry for thee then, George. I remembered thee qualities, and that I 'adn't always done as a wife should. And thinking o' thee I felt softened to all t' world—I felt sorry for Amos then; and I

took 'im out o' kindness, believe me or not, and because I were lonely and miserable and 'e were a good-livin' man.

GEORGE

As thee an' he been to church, may I make so bold to ask?

ANN

Just this day three-week. There wasn't no difficulty. Parson says when a man's been missing that long you can make sure 'e's gone—and it were time.

GEORGE

Did the parson know as it were time?

ANN

O' course. That's why he done it.

GEORGE

Seem's like thee's lost and shameless.

ANN

I'm not goin' to 'ave it for pleasure.

GEORGE

I'll kill that there Amos!

ANN

It warn't 'is fault, George. It were kind on 'im. 'E'd 'a cared for thee three little childer better than thou's done.

GEORGE

It were mean interference wi' an absent man's
'ome.

ANN

Tha munna touch 'im. It's 'is child I'm going to
'ave now.

GEORGE

I won't 'ave 'is child in my 'ouse.

ANN

Then you'll have to turn out your own wife.

GEORGE

Thee's not my wife—thee's 'is fancy woman !

ANN

But I'm married to 'im. (*Bowing her head on her
hands.*) Oh, I dunna know what I am !

GEORGE

Tha might 'a had t' patience to 'a waited a year or
two for me.

ANN

(*Looking up, trying to make her reasons clear.*) I'd 'a
waited a life-time if I'd 'a known. But I
thought happen I'd better have 'im while I'd
chance. It's 'ard on a woman not to 'ave no
'usband, and what's use o' waitin' till I'm
tired o' thought on't? Happen old age 'ud

come on me before my mind's made up, that road. I didn't like thoughts altogether, but I didn't humour mysen. I were tryin' to act for t' best. I even asked about it in my prayers, so 'ow can it be ser wrong?

GEORGE

What dosta mean? I can't get ho'd o' t' tale. I gather thee comforted thysen pretty smart, and it were Amos were thee fancy.

ANN

It were a case o' then or never, I tell thee—I doan't know what it were I did it for altogether—but I were tryin' to do right.

GEORGE

Well, 'asta gained owt by it?

ANN

Noa; I 'avena.

GEORGE

I'm glad tha admits it. It were t' moon, 'appen, as tha wanted.

ANN

'Appen it were. Anyway seems like it'll be t' moon for me. For I'd part wi' 'im willingly if it could be undone.

GEORGE

Tha's just stalled wi' discontent, any road.

ANN

(*Hotly.*) Aye, I am that. And why shouldn't I be? There's plenty 'll blame me, but 'oo made all this trouble? I 'aven't meant to do no wrong. I can't 'elp t' way the world's made and t' way I'm made mysen. You can't do more nor try to do right, no matter what folks say. Let them judge theirsens! 'Ow could I foresee then what's to 'appen i' t' future? I thought thee were dead. I took no thoughts for t' morrow—as tha's told me often enough were wisdom! Supposing now tha had been dead, I should 'a been i' t' right on't, both for Amos and t' childer. Yet it's better thee should be livin' nor dead, though it puts me i' t' wrong! It's beyond me, and I leave it to God 'oo invented it—if 'E did.

GEORGE

Thee's too dissatisfied altogether, wench. I doubt that's t' trouble. Tha were tired on me. Well, I reckon I were to blame for some o' it. Tha wished me out o' t' road happen—i' t' forefront o' t' battle, same as Uriah.

ANN

I never wish death to no man. I've seen it too often for that. And thee—thee's my husband, George, when all's said and done.

GEORGE

So were Amos!

ANN

Yer can't 'ave two 'usbands.

GEORGE

Tha seems to 'a managed it ; or so near's to make
no matter.

ANN

It warn't for long.

GEORGE

But tha can't always be chopping and changin'.

ANN

If we munna change there's little 'ope o' improvin'
matters i' this world, I'm thinkin'. We
should 'ave to go on doin' t' same thing all
us lives. And now I mun change back,
and make t' best on't.

GEORGE

But 'asta really changed ? Is it all ower now ?

ANN

I canna say that ; it will be by Christmas, all bein'
well.

GEORGE

Aye, I'd forgot that. I won't 'ave it i' my 'ouse, I
tell you ; it mun go away.

ANN

I won't give up no child o' mine.

GEORGE

Tha said tha didna want it, blast yer.

ANN

No more do I. But I shall. That's what's so cruel. It's not the things yer hate that trouble yer. It's the things yer love, and that want yer, even if they don't know it. That's where women's so different fro' men. You don't stand need 'ave owt but t' pleasure o' things.

GEORGE

I've 'ad a bit more nor pleasure sin' I left thee, lass.

ANN

(Going up to him and putting her hand on his shoulder.)
Aye; and 'appen it'll draw us together, George. *(There is a pause, for both are softened; then he draws her down and kisses her. Long pause.)*

[There is a knock at the door.]

AMOS

(Opens door and puts his head in.) Are yer aw reet, Ann?

ANN

(Starts.) Reet enough. *(Signs him back.)* Tha munna coom in, it's untimely.

AMOS

Can I 'ave my clothes, Ann?

ANN

(*Irritably.*) Whatten clothes?

AMOS

(*Opening door wide, and displaying himself.*) My work-clothes. I canna go to work i' t' morn-ing like this 'ere.

ANN

They're on't t' chair i' t' room. (*Indicates bed-room.*)

GEORGE

'Oo's that, Ann? Is it Amos come gallivantin' back?

ANN

Aye, it's Amos Crispin.

GEORGE

Bid 'im coom in.

AMOS

(*Coming just inside.*) I'd rayther not, George, I thank you. I'll say good-neet to you, and be off to my sister Lizzie's. She'll be expectin' of me.

GEORGE

(*Grimly.*) I'll wager it won't be t' first time she's missed thee.

AMOS

(*Coming down.*) No, George, an' it won't. I reckon you've heard tale.

GEORGE

I 'ave that.

AMOS

Seems like it makes me look foolish.

GEORGE

I 'adn't thought o' it i' that light—but happen it doos, a little.

AMOS

I 'adn't no idea on't, George, as you was livin'.

GEORGE

If I thought as 'ow you 'ad, Amos, you wouldn't be safe standing there, crippled as I may be. You don't stand need tell me that. And I'm not afraid o' any man. She's coom back to me, and glad. You're happen what the world'll come to when such as me's killed off. But not yet awhile.

AMOS

'Appen not, George. And I wouldna wish it. Why should I wish to come between man and wife?

GEORGE

There's plenty does; but I believe thee, not thee.

AMOS

(*Anxiously.*) There's t' childer outside cryin' for their teas, Ann.

ANN

I've 'ad no time to coddle t' childer. (*They are at door R. She calls to them.*) Come in, then.

MAUD

(*Comes in, taking Amos's hand.*) Dada'll get us us tea; this dada. I like 'im best.

VICTOR

I 'avena seen more nor one—oh, is that 'im?

ANN

Aye, Victor, that's your real dada come back again.

VICTOR

I like 'im. 'E's only got 'alf a leg. (*Runs up to George's chair.*) You may 'ave Mester Crispin, Maud.

ANN

That's wrong, Victor. Mester Crispin were always kind to thee.

VICTOR

Aye, kind; but not ser nice. (*Fingers George's uniform and blue hospital-band on sleeve.*)

ANN

Tha must forgive 'im, Amos. Childer 'ave short memories.

AMOS

It's natur, Ann. I owe 'im no grudge. (*He sets about getting the tea-things.*)

VICTOR

(*To George.*) We've got a gramophone, dada!

GEORGE

'Ow'd yer get that, sonny?

VICTOR

My mammer bought it out o' 'er money down, when she married my new dada.

MAUD

(*Briskly.*) And we've a sewing machine,—dada.

GEORGE

Seems to me that little mistake 'as 'ad it's bright side for t' childer.

ANN

Will they fetch 'em back, George?

GEORGE

What 'ud war-office do wi' 'em? I should think they'd owe me more'n a gramophone. But it's a queer world. I'm thinkin' there's

no accountin' for troubles, Ann and Amos. No morena for wars. They come on yer just when you thought you was free of them.

AMOS

Aye, just to learn us 'ow little we know o' the workin's o' providence.

ANN

Happen. Well, I'm not goin' to say thank you for 'em.

AMOS

Happen things you want wouldn't always be good for you.

ANN

(Who is also preparing tea, practically.) I don't believe i' that. The things I want is good for everyone. People is 'appiest 'oo's got them. *(This is matter-of-fact, not complaining.)* I don't believe i' being 'urt o' purpose.

GEORGE

Thee always was at outs wi' thee fortune. Now, seems to me these 'ere troubles come just to tell you 'ow well you can do wi'out them things as you've lived for—and 'ow you can live for things as you've never wanted afore—just to get us out of us 'abits, so to speak. Look 'ow we change. Th' owd people seem content wi' things they've never fancied when

young—and it's just the same wi' t' trenches—even 'ospital isn't so bad. There's things compensates for all us trouble.

ANN

What things? I never heard tell on them. Age brings nowt but experiences, and much you get out o' that, for it comes too late to be o' any use.

GEORGE

(*Reflectively.*) I've even thought as there may be things as compensates in 'ell, if we know 'ow to make t' best on it.

ANN

Tha munna say things like that before t' childer !
'Ell !

GEORGE

Why not? Childer's got to 'ear there's an 'ell, and to learn for theirsens some day; but if we can learn 'em a bit too so much the better, I say.

AMOS

Warn't yer afraid o' bein' killed i' t' trenches, George, i' state o' your soul?

GEORGE

No, I can't say as I thought much about it. There's plenty dies in all states, and I shouldn't fancy goin' anywhere where other

poor chaps 'as to be kep' out, even be they Germans. We've all got to die onst, and happen it's simplest i' war; it's better to die for summut than for nowt—and for livin'—well, you see life there. There's Colonials fro' Guineapeg, Frenchies and all; and the shells burstin' o' night-time—they is a pretty sight. Like fireworks, Maudie, only better. You don't see no danger.

VICTOR

And did yer baynit the Germans, dada?

GEORGE

(*His eyes darkening tensely.*) Aye. It canna be 'elped.

VICTOR

But don't yer want?

GEORGE

Want? Yer durstn't think. Yer do it swift, one after another, or you don't come 'ome. There was one 'e said, i' English, "Don't yer do it!" But it were too late. I said, "I've done it, mate." And so I 'ad.

AMOS

And tha wasna frettened?

GEORGE

Not me, not to speak on. Some on 'em was, but they don't fight no worse than us others.

Seems like you never can say 'oo'll fight well till you try. I reckon you'll 'ave a passive conscience, Amos ; but happen you'd get over it under fire. And some o' the bravest on us makes most fuss i' t' hospital.

ANN

Was yer well tret i' t' hospital ?

GEORGE

I was that.

MAUD

Did they 'urt you ?

GEORGE

Aye, soom. But they thought I was going. Twicet they laid me out, washed me an' all. Aye, I've seen summut I 'ave, since I last sat i' this 'ere chair ; and if it warn't for the loss o' my limb I should leave thee yet again, Ann.

ANN

Then happen there's good in all things.

GEORGE

That's just what I were tellin' thee. And I ought to be thankin' God I'm 'ere at all, for as near as not I 'ad my 'ead blown off.

ANN

George !

MAUD

(*Shrilly.*) Where's the bodies o' they angels as 'as only 'eads? Would you 'a been like them, dada?

ANN

You're excitin' 'er too much, George. I'll put 'em to bed.

MAUD

But it's at school, moother. There's a picture on 'em wi' nowt but 'eads and wings.

ANN

'Ush, Maud. You mun go. You've finished your teas.

VICTOR

Let dada tell us summut first!

MAUD

Aye, dada. Tell us a story.

GEORGE

I'll tell you stories and to spare, childer, but not to-neet; stories o' trenches and guns and entanglements—and soldiers, all sorts on 'em—Goorkhas—you'd think they was the dwarfies come again! But go thi ways to bed now, like good childer, as your mother

bids you. We'll 'ave plenty o' time to-morrow.

[The children are hustled out. Ann goes with them, but returns immediately with a heap of Amos's clothes.]

I've been a long way, Amos, but not quite so far as yon little card sent me. And we'll let bygones be bygones. We'll 'ave a smoke together, Amos, as we was wont. I've looked forrad to a smoke i' my own 'ome through many a long day. (*Ann re-enters here.*) But, Ann, I've not seen that there Doris you spoke of. Can't you fetch 'er in?

ANN

(*Laying down the clothes.*) It 'ud happen wake her. You shall see 'em all when t' other childer's i' bed.

GEORGE

Aye, 'appen that's better.

[Ann goes into bedroom to children.]

Shake 'ands wi' me, Amos. (*He struggles on to his crutches.*) We'll 'ave no grudges and grievances in the 'ome-comin'. (*They take each other's hand.*) You can't spend the 'ole of your bloody time 'atin' your enemies. By-gones *is* bygones now.

AMOS

Aye, George. You're a wonderful man!

[They stand clasping hands.]

GEORGE

(*Complacently.*) Aye, Amos.

ANN

(*At bedroom-door.*) Coom in, George ; but dunna make a noise.

[*George slowly limps to bedroom. Amos looks after him, then crosses and picks up his bundle of clothes.*]

AMOS

I'd best be off to my sister Lizzie's now, or happen she'll gi' me a bit o' her toong !

CURTAIN



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